

Fit to be tide — again

Opening of new Dingley Island bridge celebrated

BY ELIZABETH DORSEY
Times Record Staff

HARPSWELL

It was much more than a celebration of a new bridge.

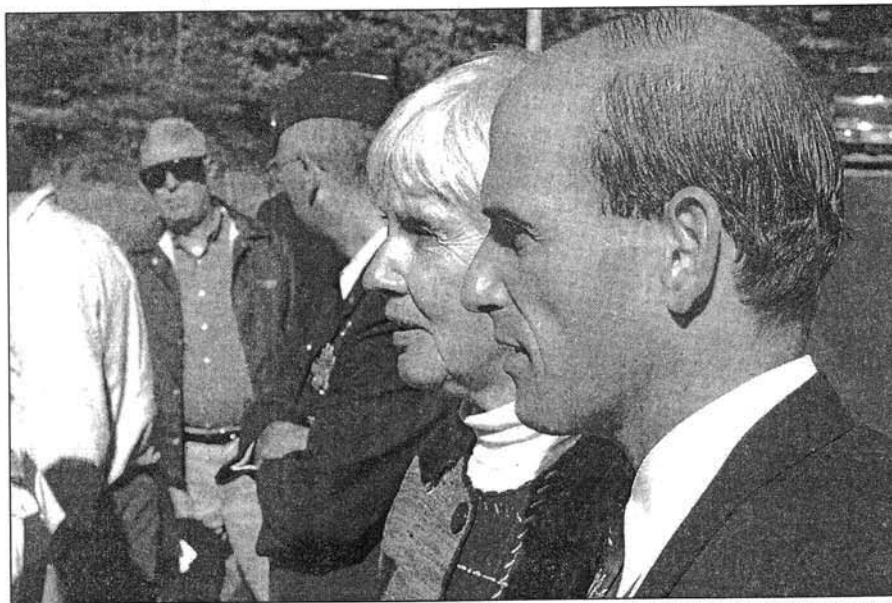
To those present, Tuesday's ceremony dedicating the span between Dingley and Great islands crowned years of hard work and persistence by individuals, organizations and government agencies.

Led by Harpswell resident Elsa Martz, a legion of people succeeded this summer in replacing a section of the 200-foot Dingley Island causeway with a bridge. As a result, 45 acres of soft-shell clam habitat now experience the natural ebb and flow of the tides.

In addition to restored clam flats, the new bridge also is expected to benefit striped bass and herring and provide new recreational opportunities for boaters, who can now navigate underneath the bridge at high tide.

With Martz leading the charge, groups such as Maine Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Coastal America, the Navy's Innovative Readiness Training program, the town and countless individuals have come together over the last seven years to raise money and plan the project.

The collaboration garnered \$115,000 in grant funding that



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ELSA MARTZ, the Harpswell resident who spearheaded the effort to build a bridge to Dingley Island that would restore tidal flow to nearby clam flats, and Gov. John Baldacci view the bridge and surrounding area after the dedication ceremony Tuesday.

was matched through donations of services, materials, cash, equipment and discounts.

"This is how you get education, health care, preserving and protecting natural resources in this state," said Gov. John Baldacci, who attended Tuesday's dedication. "This is a model for how Maine people and communities can solve their problems through collaborative effort."

Concerned about silt build-up adjacent to the causeway, Martz in 1996 came up with the idea to open the causeway to tidal flow. The effort grew to include dozens of individuals, the town, state and federal

agencies, and private corporations, which have donated time, money and services.

First built in the 1890s, the causeway did once contain a short section of bridge that allowed the tides to flow north and south between the islands. But around 1950, when the causeway was raised and widened, the bridge section was filled in and the tidal flow was blocked. The resulting build-up of fine sediments left the area unsuitable for soft-shell clams.

At Tuesday's dedication, speakers praised the spirit of cooperation, but most of all they praised Martz for her ceaseless work in restoring

the clam habitat.

Cmdr. William Sheedy of the First Naval Construction Division called Martz "a true Seabee in her own right."

"Maybe we ought to change her middle name to 'can do,' the motto of the Seabees," he said.

In response to her the plaudits, Martz simply stated that she was happy to work with so many good people.

"It's wonderful. It's kind of hard to take it all in," said Martz, before turning to talk to Gov. Baldacci about desalination, the next issue she plans to tackle in Harpswell.

edorsey@timesrecord.com